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SUBJECT: TURKEY: REGULATORY BODY DEFENDS MEASURES LIMITING
KURDISH-LANGUAGE BROADCASTS

REF: ANKARA 6016

1.(SBU) Summary: Officials from Turkey's Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTUK) praised GOT policy on non-Turkish language broadcasting, and downplayed criticisms that regulations are burdensome for start-up broadcasters. The RTUK also defended GOT efforts to shut down Denmark-based and PKK-affiliated Roj-TV, and did not see value in the suggestion that more Kurdish-language broadcasting would draw viewers away from Roj. The RTUK told us the GOT would expand Kurdish-language broadcasting rights in coming years. In an environment of increasing nationalism, the GOT is unlikely to do so prior to next year's presidential and parliamentary elections. End summary.

2.(SBU) During a recent meeting, officials from the Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTUK) praised GOT policy on Kurdish-language television broadcasting. RTUK Head of International Relations Department Sebnem Bilget told us that RTUK recently abolished broadcasting time restrictions for Kurdish-language cultural shows or films. She characterized the move as a great step forward for freedom of expression in Turkey. She confirmed, however, that RTUK still limits pure news broadcasts to 45 minutes per day and continues to require non-Turkish shows to have Turkish subtitles (see reftel). Bilget dismissed allegations that such regulations are unduly burdensome or financially onerous. She told us that the RTUK treats all regional broadcasters equally, and noted that most countries have complex regulations governing broadcasting. She also noted that broadcasting is an inherently expensive business.

3.(SBU) Bilget and RTUK regulatory expert Nuran Yardimci staunchly defended the GOT's efforts to close down Denmark-based and PKK-affiliated Roj-TV, which most southeastern Kurds watch via satellite (see reftel). Yardimci told us that the GOT had convinced Belgium, France, and the UK to shut down Roj-precursors such as MED-TV, and were confident that their lobbying efforts would convince Denmark to do the same with Roj.

4.(SBU) Bilget and Yardimci dismissed the suggestion that permitting more Kurdish language broadcasting would draw viewers away from Roj-TV. Bilget said that the political sensitivity surrounding language rights necessitates a slow change. She told us that she expects the GOT to allow more Kurdish-language broadcasting in the coming years.

5.(SBU) Comment: The RTUK continues to support an outdated policy that focuses efforts on blocking allegedly dangerous content in order to "protect" citizens. In most cases, Turkey's Kurds can, and do, circumvent GOT regulations through satellite or high-speed Internet reception. A more constructive policy would be to show the EU a good-faith effort to expand freedom of expression. The GOT, however, is unlikely to liberalize broadcasting rules in the lead-up to next year's elections. End comment.

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